United Nations A/67/892

General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 June 2013

Original: English

Sixty-seventh session
Agenda item 33
Prevention of armed conflict

Implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/262 on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 67/262 of 15 May 2013, in which the Assembly requested me to report within 30 days on the implementation of the resolution. The report provides an update on political, security, humanitarian and human rights aspects for the period from 15 May to 14 June 2013.

2. The overall situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to deteriorate during the reporting period. The armed forces of the Government, along with pro-Government militias, and the armed opposition continued to engage in violent confrontation. The threat of regional destabilization owing to the conflict continued to grow. The direct involvement of Hizbullah fighters inside the Syrian Arab Republic, as acknowledged by the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, in defiance of the disassociation policy of the Government of Lebanon, has given new momentum to the military approach of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and escalated dangerous sectarian and political tensions inside Lebanon. A number of cross-border security incidents were also reported. The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic deteriorated further. Civilians continued to flee to neighbouring countries and other countries in the region. The independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic continued to document violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, on the basis of information collected outside the country as, at the time of writing, the Government had not yet granted the commission access to its territory.

3. Following the receipt of requests from the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic, France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on 21 March 2013, I established the United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic (see S/2013/184).

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Several additional allegations of the use of chemical weapons were brought to my attention by Member States during the reporting period, while the investigation mission continued to study relevant information provided by Member States and remained ready to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic within 48-72 hours of the authorization of the Government.

4. Various international diplomatic efforts aimed to help the Syrian parties find a political solution to the conflict continued. While the central effort of holding the Geneva conference on the Syrian Arab Republic, to allow the parties to determine jointly how to fully implement the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (see A/66/865-S/2012/522, annex), dated 30 June 2012, gained momentum during the reporting period, other initiatives also continued to take place.

II. Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/262

5. I remain convinced that only a political solution can bring the escalating conflict and the continued suffering of the people in the Syrian Arab Republic to an end. During the reporting period, I engaged with Member States and regional organizations to build on the diplomatic opportunity offered by the understanding reached between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, and the Secretary of State of the United States of America, John Kerry, on 7 May in Moscow. The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, continued to explore ways to ensure the success of the Geneva conference on the Syrian Arab Republic, while the Russian Federation and the United States, and other members of the international community, started engaging the Syrian sides in the context of this initiative. On 5 June, Mr. Brahimi chaired a trilateral meeting in Geneva initiated and organized by the United Nations to bring senior officials from the Russian Federation, the United States and the United Nations together, under the leadership of the Joint Special Representative, to discuss the modalities of convening the conference. Mr. Brahimi plans to hold another trilateral meeting in late June to continue discussions.

6. I intend to convene the Geneva conference on the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible. The conference will enable the two Syrian sides — the Government and the opposition — to start negotiations. With the support of the international community, the two sides will jointly determine how to fully implement the final communiqué of 30 June 2012, in particular the agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led transition contained therein.

7. Regional initiatives also took place during the reporting period. The League of Arab States held meetings of its standing committee on the Syrian Arab Republic on 23 May. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic was also discussed during the ministerial meeting of the League on 5 June. Jordan hosted a ministerial meeting of 11 nations (Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States) on 22 May, at which efforts to support the opposition and end the conflict were discussed. The Islamic Republic of Iran held an international conference on 29 May to discuss issues related to a political solution to the Syrian conflict and regional instability.

8. Meanwhile, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continued to promote its own political programme, announced by the President, Bashar Al-Assad, in January 2013. To this end, the Government formed ministerial and provincial committees to prepare a national dialogue conference with political and civil society groups sanctioned by the Government. Despite several meetings, most political and armed opposition groups inside and outside the Syrian Arab Republic continued to reject this process and refuse to engage with the Government.

9. Home-grown attempts to unify political groupings inside the Syrian Arab Republic failed owing to the lack of a broad base of support and competition over leadership and positioning to achieve a stronger role during the transition phase. The inability of political groups and parties to meet freely and work on political activities without fear of being detained also remained a major factor that continued to hamper unity. With the exception of some Kurdish political parties, the internal political opposition lacked influence over armed opposition groups.

10. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces continued its efforts to expand its membership in an attempt to represent more segments of Syrian society. The Coalition held a series of meetings in Istanbul from 23 to 30 May, where its membership expanded from 63 to 114 individuals, including representatives from grass-roots organizations inside the Syrian Arab Republic and the Free Syrian Army. Other Syrian opposition leaders held a meeting in Madrid on 20 May.

11. As various Syrian political groups undertook efforts to organize themselves, violent confrontation between the armed forces of the Government, as well as pro-Government militias, and armed opposition groups and militias continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. While the United Nations does not have first-hand information, reports from various sources, including official statements of the Government, suggest that the conflicting parties continue to pursue a military solution.

12. In an attempt to reassert control over areas under opposition control and to stop the advance of armed opposition groups, government forces and pro-Government militias undertook offensive operations in several parts of the country, notably in Al-Qusayr, Homs Province, which reverted to government control on 5 June after weeks of intensive fighting. There are indications of new offensives being planned in the areas of Homs, Hama and Aleppo, as government forces seek to capitalize on their recent gains. The city of Damascus remained largely under government control, but clashes continued to the east and south of the city. The armed opposition continued to dominate vast rural areas in the eastern and northern parts of the country, including large sections of Hama and Idlib Provinces, as well as most of the territory of Raqqa Province, where the Al-Nusra Front and other extremist groups were active. There were reports that armed groups were increasingly involved in criminal activities in Deir Ez-Zor and other border areas in the east.

13. Government forces relied on their air and artillery assets and the support of pro-Government militias, including newly established paramilitary units such as the "National Defence Army" and the "Lioness for National Defence". According to credible reports, Hizbullah fighters played a growing and prominent role in the actual fighting in support of Government forces in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Secretary-General of Hizbullah publicly acknowledged in a recent speech that

Hizbullah was fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic, and thereby put Hizbullah on the record for violating the official disassociation policy of the Government of Lebanon, in which Hizbullah is represented. In its report of 4 June 2013 to the Human Rights Council, the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic described the crimes committed by government forces and affiliated militia and paramilitary groups as war crimes and gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law (see A/HRC/23/58).

14. Armed opposition groups defended areas under their control and tried to open new fronts in Aleppo, Dara'a, Homs and Damascus Provinces. Available information suggests that they remained fragmented, despite attempts to unify military units at local levels. Reports also suggest that extremist groups continued to spread and attract fighters, including from outside the Syrian Arab Republic. In the report of the commission of inquiry mentioned in the paragraph above, it was found that anti-Government armed groups had committed war crimes.

15. On 30 May 2013, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities approved, in line with Security Council resolution 2083 (2012), the amendments to the entry related to the group Al-Qaida in Iraq, to include Al-Nusra Front.

16. In a significant development during the reporting period, on 6 June, armed opposition forces briefly seized a crossing point between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in the Golan that was operated by the Syrian authorities. Two peacekeepers of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) were lightly injured during these attacks. The continuously deteriorating operational environment for UNDOF compelled the Government of Austria to announce the withdrawal of its military contingent. I regret this decision and have reached out to all relevant troop-contributing countries to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the Austrian peacekeepers and their replacement.

17. The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to deteriorate at a rapid pace. United Nations agencies estimated that over 6.8 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country, including 4.2 million internally displaced persons, more than 3 million of whom were children. The situation of Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic also remained of utmost concern. More than 60,000 have fled to neighbouring Lebanon (56,500) and Jordan (6,700). The number of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic in neighbouring countries is now close to 1.6 million. There were urgent needs in all sectors of humanitarian assistance.

18. A collapsed health-care infrastructure combined with fear and insecurity, a limited workforce and a lack of essential medicines, supplies and health professionals have seriously impeded the provision of primary and secondary health care. Health facilities and local pharmacies were increasingly unable to provide medicines for patients who required continuous treatment for chronic diseases. According to the Ministry of Health, 57 per cent of public hospitals were affected, with 37 per cent out of service and 20 per cent partially damaged. The inability to physically access health facilities was particularly pronounced in areas heavily affected by insecurity. Given the escalating violence, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned in March 2013 that dozens of Syrians were dying every day

owing to limited access to health care and shortages of essential medical supplies. That warning remained valid throughout the reporting period.

19. In order to meet the humanitarian needs, the United Nations and its partners have significantly scaled up their response over the past several months, including through strengthened partnerships and the establishment of humanitarian hubs in Homs and Tartous. Agencies continued to work closely with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and local non-governmental organizations. The World Food Programme worked to increase its ability to reach people in need, from 2.5 million to 3 million people per month, by July. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization, as well as other humanitarian agencies, continued to do their best to reach all those in need. By the end of the reporting period, more than 2.9 million people had received critical medical supplies; some 3 million children had received vaccinations; 360,000 women had been provided with reproductive health kits; and some 70,000 women had received emergency obstetric care. In addition, more than 9.3 million people had been provided with access to clean drinking water. Almost 1 million people — the vast majority of whom were internally displaced — had been provided with essential non-food items. About 100,000 children had received psychosocial and recreational support, while 260,000 children had been able to attend school clubs across the country.

20. Humanitarian assistance was delivered to affected people in all 14 governorates, including in some opposition areas. A significant proportion of those assisted by the World Food Programme were located in such areas; 3.25 million of the 9.3 million people who received assistance in terms of access to clean drinking water were reached across conflict lines. From the beginning of 2013 to the end of the reporting period, 15 inter-agency humanitarian convoys had been organized, allowing relief organizations to reach 1,175,000 people with food, essential non-food items and health supplies, including vaccines, in hard-to-reach areas, most of which were opposition-controlled areas or locations of active conflict.

21. Lack of access continued to impede humanitarian operations. In particular, rising insecurity and ongoing bureaucratic hurdles, as well as a continued lack of capacity, undermined efforts to increase the scale of humanitarian operations and reach all people in need. For example, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic refused almost all access to the town of Al-Qusayr and surrounding villages, which led the Security Council to issue a statement on 7 June calling for immediate, safe and unhindered access to be allowed, in accordance with the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, for relevant humanitarian actors, including the United Nations, to reach civilians in urgent need of assistance, in particular medical assistance. Fighting, aerial bombardment, kidnappings, carjackings and other threats were common features of the operational environment. Discussions with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on cross-border operations did not lead to an agreement during the reporting period.

22. On 7 June, United Nations agencies and partners launched a revised humanitarian response plan ($1.4 billion) and a refugee response plan (over $2.9 billion) for the Syrian Arab Republic to assist 6.8 million people inside the country and 3.5 million refugees in neighbouring countries until the end of 2013. Together, the plans seek to raise close to $4.4 billion and form the largest humanitarian appeal in history. As at 6 June, donors had contributed just over

$1.2 billion to humanitarian efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries, leaving a gap of almost $3.2 billion. In addition, the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon both launched appeals to the international community, for $380 million and $450 million respectively.

23. Gross violations of human rights continued to be committed during the reporting period. As the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic reached new levels of brutality, a monitoring team of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights deployed to the region in March 2013, where it continued its efforts to monitor the human rights situation inside the country from neighbouring countries. On 13 June, the High Commissioner released an updated analysis documenting 92,901 cases of individuals killed in the Syrian Arab Republic between 1 March 2011 and 30 April 2013. The analysis showed a steep increase in the average number of killings since the beginning of the conflict, from around 1,000 per month in the summer of 2011 to an average of more than 5,000 per month since July 2012.

24. In its report submitted to the Human Rights Council on 4 June (A/HRC/23/58), the independent international commission of inquiry indicated that war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights continued apace. The commission called upon the General Assembly to support its work, inviting the commission to provide regular updates, and to uphold its recommendations. It called upon the Human Rights Council, through me, to transmit the report of the commission to the Security Council. This would enable the commission to provide periodic briefings to the Security Council. The commission reiterated its call to all parties to allow unhindered access to the Syrian Arab Republic. It called upon the Security Council to commit to ensure the accountability of perpetrators, including by possible referral to international justice mechanisms. The commission continued to investigate more than a dozen horrific massacres committed by both pro- and anti-Government forces.

25. Further to the press statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of 10 May, in which she expressed concern for the safety of civilians during the military build-up in and around the town of Al-Qusayr, the Human Rights Council convened an urgent debate on 29 May 2013 on the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic and the recent killings in Al-Qusayr. In her opening statement, the High Commissioner renewed her call to the Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court. In a resolution adopted on the same day, the Human Rights Council requested the commission of inquiry to investigate the events in Al-Qusayr and report the findings to Council at its twenty-fourth session. It also demanded that the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic allow free and unimpeded access by the United Nations and humanitarian agencies to all civilians affected by the violence, especially in Al-Qusayr, through all effective routes, including by providing authorization for cross-border humanitarian operations as an urgent priority.

26. The situation of women and girls remained particularly dramatic. Reportedly, sexual and gender-based violence remained widespread. Sexual violence was cited as a primary reason for women and girls fleeing their homes. The commission of inquiry reported that sexual violence had become a persistent feature of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Rape and other inhumane acts were committed by government forces and affiliated militia, as well as armed opposition groups.

According to some accounts gathered by the commission, women were segregated during house searches carried out by anti-Government armed groups, the implication being that sexual violence might have taken place. Women in refugee camps faced gender-based violence, including early marriage and domestic violence. In my report to the General Assembly and the Security Council on sexual violence in conflict dated 14 March 2013 (A/67/792-S/2013/149), the following trends pertaining to crimes of sexual violence in the context of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic were identified: the occurrence of sexual violence during house searches and at checkpoints; the perpetration of rape and torture in detention, particularly against men and boys; the trafficking in young women and girls; and the coercion of young Syrian girls outside of Syria into marriage. These crimes were committed both by government and opposition forces.

27. As confirmed by the commission of inquiry, the civilian population, including children, continued to suffer from indiscriminate bombardment and other attacks. Government sieges led to health and nutrition crises that disproportionately affected children under 5 years of age. As at the time of reporting, hundreds of children had been maimed owing to the use of heavy weaponry. Schools were utilized by military forces and children continued to be detained on suspicion of being associated with the opposition; often, they were tortured. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict verified that opposition armed groups recruited and used children in their forces and that some groups resorted to terror tactics that resulted in the death and injury of children and other civilians. Children who have been subjected to torture, including sexual torture, continue to need expert care. My Special Representative will visit the region soon to assess the situation and advocate more support for the many children inside and outside the Syrian Arab Republic who continue to suffer from a lack of adequate nourishment, health and rehabilitative care.

28. The Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons is currently working on a report to be presented to the General Assembly by 13 August 2013. Other parts of the United Nations system are providing contributions to the forthcoming report.

29. The United Nations investigation mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic remained unable to carry out its fact-finding activities inside the Syrian Arab Republic because the Government did not give it authorization to access the country. As a result, I have decided to maintain the mission in reduced operational readiness to deal with the requests received so far, as well as with any other allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The mission will continue to monitor developments and collect information. The Head of mission, Åke Sellström, visited some capitals and is currently assessing other options for fact-finding activities outside the Syrian Arab Republic, including in neighbouring States. Additional allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic were brought to my attention during the reporting period.

30. Through an inter-agency task force, relevant United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes continued contingency planning efforts to ensure that the United Nations system is sufficiently prepared and has the necessary plans and capacities in place to respond quickly and effectively to potential requests. Consideration has been given to a range of options, scenarios and potential

requirements in terms of United Nations functions in support of a political transition. Planning efforts also aim at ensuring an early impact even as more comprehensive Syrian-led needs assessments are conducted. Efforts are being made to ensure complementarity with on-going humanitarian work. This work has also included reaching out to and liaising with multilateral partners, as well as regional and international organizations.

31. The Syrian crisis had an increasingly destabilizing impact on neighbouring countries during the reporting period. The massive influx of refugees continued to pose unprecedented challenges for both Lebanon and Jordan, who were hosting, at the time of writing, the first- and second-largest numbers of Syrian refugees: more than 530,000 such refugees had been registered and/or assisted in Lebanon and 179,000 in Jordan. The absorption capacity of these two States was sorely tested. Threats to the security of Lebanon have increased over the past month, while the open commitment of Hizbullah to military engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the involvement of other Lebanese elements in support of the armed opposition undermined the disassociation policy of Lebanon and could threaten the country's stability. Lebanon continued to witness armed confrontations between groups siding with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition, amid continued isolated strikes by government forces inside Lebanon. The fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic deepened the political divide inside Lebanon, and intra-Lebanese clashes led to growing numbers of Lebanese casualties, including in Tripoli, the Beqa' Valley and Beirut. The situation at the border with Turkey, Iraq and Jordan remained volatile, prompting further security measures to mitigate the impact of the Syrian conflict. The Government of Iraq too strengthened measures to ensure the protection of its border with the Syrian Arab Republic.

32. United Nations personnel operating in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to experience distressing risks to safety and security. Most United Nations personnel were relocated from Homs on 8 June, following the deterioration of security conditions owing to fighting in Al-Qusayr. Eighteen locally recruited United Nations personnel were treated for respiratory problems in Damascus on 26 May 2013, following the use of what was indicated to have been a possible riot-control agent. Fourteen United Nations personnel (3 national staff and 11 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) remained detained by security forces and without access to legal representation or assistance, while an additional five personnel were missing. The deterioration of the security situation led to higher levels of crime, exposing personnel to the threat of abduction; a number of abduction cases were in fact ongoing. The problems faced by humanitarian personnel owing to a lack of access were demonstrated by United Nations missions that were intercepted and abducted, and by several incidents of small-arms fire directed against United Nations vehicles. Clashes near main transportation links raised the risk of United Nations personnel becoming trapped in the fighting, with no safe route by which to escape. In Damascus, the indiscriminate use of mortars and rockets placed United Nations personnel at much higher risk, even within areas controlled by government forces. Efforts to identify longer-term and more secure United Nations common premises in Damascus were unsuccessful, while a number of improvised explosive device attacks within the city illustrated the vulnerability of current United Nations locations.

III. Conclusions

33. I remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and escalating armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I urge all parties to facilitate the safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian organizations to people in need wherever they are, through the most efficient route. I continue to appeal to the international community to unite to stop this tragedy, which is deepening every day.

34. During the reporting period, just as during any other stretch of time over the past two years, the Syrian people witnessed yet another tragedy in the Syrian Arab Republic. This time, the government forces' takeover of the town of Al-Qusayr, Homs Province, resulted in deaths, injuries and destruction. I continued to appeal to the conflicting sides to ensure the protection of civilians and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

35. The Lebanese Hizbullah militia force were openly and admittedly involved at Al-Qusayr, alongside the forces of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The increasing role of Hizbullah on behalf of the Government in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic has further raised fears that the Syrian conflict will have an increasing impact on the whole region and has contributed to a rise in the already dangerous levels of tension inside Lebanon. On 26 May, I expressed deep concern over the participation of Hizbullah in the fighting, reiterating my opposition to the transfer of arms and fighters from outside the Syrian Arab Republic to either side inside the country and calling on all States, organizations and groups to immediately cease supporting the violence in that country and to use their influence to promote a political solution to the tragedy instead. I have repeatedly called on all Lebanese leaders and parties to adhere strictly to the disassociation policy of the Baabda Declaration to keep Lebanon safe from conflict (see A/66/849-S/2012/477). Parties and leaders cannot legitimately claim to be acting in the best interests of Lebanon while simultaneously deploying fighters to either side of the Syrian conflict. By undermining the disassociation policy and sidelining government leaders and institutions, these parties are placing Lebanon at grave risk of both internal strife and spillover from the conflict. This danger is demonstrated by the growing frequency with which clashes are taking place inside Lebanon, resulting in casualties. I note that important elements of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006) on the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias remain to be fulfilled. It is important for the stability and security of Lebanon that the territory and borders of Lebanon fall under the exclusive authority of the Lebanese State.

36. More generally, the logic of war that is at play in the Syrian Arab Republic is not only fuelling internal tensions in the neighbouring societies but also exacerbating tensions in the region, creating a dangerously volatile environment. The worsening situation in the Golan, in particular the repeated and continued violations of the disengagement agreement, puts the region at real risk of destabilization. I have repeatedly stressed my grave concerns, urging that all sides abide by their obligations under international law and relevant United Nations resolutions and act responsibly and in a manner that contributes to a de-escalation of tensions. I reiterate my appeal to all regional and international stakeholders to de-escalate tensions, exercise restraint and prevent further tensions.

37. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is now well into its third year, continues to escalate. Ordinary Syrians are the primary victims. One in three Syrians is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. All Palestinian refugee camps in the country, despite continued efforts to preserve their neutrality, are now overwhelmed by the conflict and the fabric of the entire community is disintegrating. At the same time, the Palestinian refugee community has few means of support outside the camps and neighbourhoods, and limited options for refuge outside the Syrian Arab Republic. This unacceptable situation for all in the Syrian Arab Republic will only continue to worsen if the conflict continues to rage. While the United Nations family and its partners continue to dramatically increase their response efforts (overcoming security, access and bureaucratic hurdles), humanitarian needs will continue to outpace their efforts. Gaps in the humanitarian response will remain. With the onset of summer, it is likely that the Syrian Arab Republic will face increased risks of waterborne diseases, unless water networks are restored, while the number of immunizations and vaccinations are already falling short of the need.

38. I reiterate my appeal to the donor community to support generously the humanitarian appeals launched on 7 June. These funds are important and save the lives of ordinary Syrians, who otherwise have nowhere to go when their homes are destroyed or taken over by the sides in the conflict. I also call for generous support to be extended to the neighbouring countries, which continue to show remarkable hospitality to the refugee communities. I thank their Governments and urge them to maintain their generous and courageous efforts in sheltering over 1.6 million refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and to keep their borders open for all those fleeing the violence. I also call upon Member States to consider hosting Syrian refugees on the basis of burden-sharing principles and in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

39. Furthermore, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic must allow access for human rights monitoring, including by the commission of inquiry, and for service providers, including to respond to survivors of sexual violence. I call on all parties to the conflict to make specific, time-bound commitments to prevent sexual violence in line with Security Council resolution 1960 (2010).

40. I also reiterate my appeal to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to allow the United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic access to its territory. I remain gravely concerned about the possibility of such use, in particular since I recently received additional allegations. I emphasize the responsibility of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for ensuring the safety and security of any chemical weapons and related materials.

41. I am very concerned that the conflicting parties in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to fail in their obligations and responsibility to protect civilians. The indiscriminate use of heavy weapons in populated areas and urban centres in pursuit of military objectives is unacceptable. Arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, the taking of hostages, kidnappings and the targeting of medical facilities and staff in this conflict must stop. Furthermore, reports of the rising sectarian rhetoric, including in the region, raise grave concerns about the possibility of reprisal attacks. I would like to remind the parties to the conflict that the eyes of the international community are upon them and that they will be held accountable for all atrocities and crimes. At the same time, the flow of arms from outside the

Syrian Arab Republic — both to the Government and the opposition — needs to be stemmed, as it contributes to the prolonged and desperate suffering of civilians.

42. Together with the entire United Nations system, I will continue to do everything that is in our power to help Syrians overcome the suffering caused by the escalating conflict and to build on every opportunity to help the Syrian people develop a Syrian-led alternative to the use of force. The resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly continue to provide the basis for our work as we now move towards convening the Geneva conference on the Syrian Arab Republic.

43. I will spare no effort in helping the Syrians determine a path — backed by united international support — to come to the negotiating table and move towards a democratic political system, with equal rights for all. Mr. Brahimi, in close cooperation with Mr. Feltman, is actively preparing the next meeting, planned for 25 June, with senior officials of the Russian Federation and the United States to make progress on the modalities of the Geneva conference on the Syrian Arab Republic. As all our energies are now focused on convening that conference, I expect the Russian Federation and the United States, as initiating parties, as well as other members of the international community, including in the region, to do their utmost to urge the sides in the conflict to engage constructively in order to agree rapidly on comprehensive and sustainable results to put an end to the conflict and set the Syrian Arab Republic on a path of genuine and irreversible political transition.

44. I appeal to all international, regional and Syrian stakeholders to engage in good faith and constructively in this process. The growing and unacceptable suffering of civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic should be a reminder of the urgency for Syrian, regional and international actors to end the conflict and start, as mentioned above, on a path of genuine and irreversible political transition to a new Syria that protects the rights of all its people and communities and fulfils the legitimate aspirations of all its citizens for freedom, dignity and justice. This is not the time for brinkmanship but for true leadership and vision in the interest of all in the Syrian Arab Republic and the entire region.

45. In conclusion, I would like to express my deep appreciation to humanitarian workers in the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere in the region for their dedicated work under very challenging and dangerous conditions. I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr. Brahimi for his efforts in the pursuit of peace in the Syrian Arab Republic.